

WASHINGTON – Congressman Curt Weldon (R-PA) and House Democratic Whip Steny Hoyer (MD), Co-Chairs of the Congressional Fire Services Caucus, helped to successfully fund the Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response Firefighters (SAFER) and Fire Grants Programs at \$155 million more than the Administration's Fiscal Year 2006 budget request. The funding is in the Fiscal Year 2006 Homeland Security Appropriations bill that is being considered on the House Floor today.

The SAFER Program helps local fire departments hire, recruit and retain career and volunteer firefighters, and the Fire Grants program helps provide them with the best technology and equipment.

"Firefighters and other first responders are the first line of defense when our country faces a national security situation or a natural disaster, as we have so painfully seen in the wake of the September 11th terrorist attacks and Hurricanes Katrina and Rita," said Hoyer. "It is imperative that we ensure that firehouses across the country are adequately staffed and have the best equipment. These brave men and women risk their lives everyday for their fellow citizens, and we must enable them to serve their communities in the most safe and effective way."

"As a former fire chief, I have witnessed firsthand the challenges that first responders face when it comes to getting all of the necessary resources available to protect their communities," said Weldon, founder of the Congressional Fire Services Caucus and vice chairman of the Homeland Security Committee. "This critical funding will ensure that first responders are able to approach their jobs with the best equipment and staffing levels, and ultimately make the nation's communities safer."

President Bush's FY2006 budget proposal included only \$500 million for the Fire Grant Program and no funding for SAFER, severely cutting the funding levels of \$650 million for the Fire Grant Program and \$65 million for the SAFER Program in FY2005.

In a demonstration of strong opposition to the under-funding of these proposals, Congressman Hoyer organized a bipartisan letter signed by 120 House members to the Homeland Security Appropriations Subcommittee urging the SAFER program be funded in FY2006. In response to the letter, the Committee provided \$50 million for SAFER, as well as \$550 million for the Fire Grants.

Hoyer, Weldon and Ranking Democrat on the Homeland Security Appropriations Subcommittee Martin Sabo (D-MN) then successfully offered a floor amendment during House consideration to add \$25 million to both SAFER and Fire Grants, bringing the levels to \$75 million and \$575 million, respectively. This was a total of \$150 million above the levels requested by the President. The Senate-passed Homeland Security Appropriations Bill provided \$115 million for SAFER and \$550 million for Fire Grants.

The Conference report being considered by the House today contains \$110 million for SAFER and \$545 million for Fire Grants, which is a total of \$155 million more than the President's original request.

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